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TAGS: [MOPS](#) [PREL](#) [AF](#) [IZ](#) [CA](#) [ISAF](#)

SUBJECT: CANADA TO PROVIDE BATTALION AND BRIGADE
HEADQUARTERS FOR ISAF IV AND V

REF: STATE 29380

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Brian Flora,
Reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

1. (C) SUMMARY: Canadian Defense Minister John McCallum announced on February 12 that Canada will contribute a battalion and a brigade headquarters - a total of 1500 to 2000 personnel - to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan beginning in August. Two rotations of Canadian Forces will be in Afghanistan for six months each, covering ISAF IV and ISAF V. Canada is looking to partner with Germany, the Netherlands or a NATO contingent in ISAF IV, and with Italy in ISAF V. While the official opposition Canadian Alliance Party has criticized the ISAF commitment as an easy alternative to military participation in Iraq, the GoC still has its options open, especially for naval and air assets already in the region as part of Operation Enduring Freedom. The Chretien Government's unwillingness to take deployment steps that could be seen as prejudging UN inspections in Iraq made ISAF a more attractive option for the use of Canadian ground forces. END SUMMARY.

2. (C) While McCallum had discussed Canada's ISAF contribution with Defense Secretary Rumsfeld on February 4, the GoC had put off announcing this decision because it wanted this to be seen as separate from a Canadian decision on a military contribution against Iraq. McCallum emphasized to the press that the ISAF contribution does not affect Canada's decision on Iraq, though he admitted it limits the availability of certain forces. The far more likely contribution for Iraq is Canadian naval and air assets already in theater as part of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). Canada is currently in command of Naval Task Force 151, and is deploying a Destroyer to the region.

3. (C) Ever since the GoC announced that it would not be replacing its light infantry battalion that served in Afghanistan January - July 2002 as part of OEF, it has kept open the possibility of sending troops back to Afghanistan in 2003, when operational tempo made it more feasible. After his January 9 meeting with Secretary Rumsfeld and discussions with other allies, McCallum told Cabinet that Canada was being encouraged to take on a leadership role in ISAF. Internally, the Canadian Forces complained that this foreclosed the ground forces option in Iraq, but they were overruled. As Ron Hoffman, Foreign Affairs Director for Defense and Security Relations, told us, the GoC takes seriously its obligations in Afghanistan and wants to help ensure the success of the transition there.

4. (C) Wendy Gilmour, Foreign Affairs Deputy Director for Regional Security and Peacekeeping, told us that German and Dutch military officials will be briefing Canadian counterparts on ISAF on February 18. The Canadian Forces do not have sufficient resources available to lead ISAF on their own, Gilmour said, and they hope to partner with the Germans, the Dutch or (if France relents) a NATO contingent in ISAF IV. Prime Minister Chretien has already discussed a possible partnership with German Chancellor Schroeder. For ISAF V, Canada hopes that Italy will be able to join. Gilmour noted that Italy has expressed interest in that time frame, coming after an Italian battalion is scheduled to depart Kosovo.

5. (C) Canada will be working on a force generation plan as it sees what capabilities are needed to complement other partners. Transport for the Canadian Forces is likely to be commercial, assuming the security situation in Afghanistan does not deteriorate. We asked about Canada's views on possibly expanding ISAF beyond Kabul. Gilmour said that she did not expect the ISAF mandate to change. As for working with Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs - reftel), Gilmour had earlier expressed concern about PRTs blurring the line between combat and peace support missions, but said that she recently had gotten positive feedback from NGOs and the UN about PRT efforts in Afghanistan.

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